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Salt as a Symbol of Resistance: A Study of Inchudi during the Civil Disobedience Movement

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Abstract:-

India is not just a land; it is the mother of the mass population of the country. From time immemorial until today, whenever it faced an attack and threat from outside or inside, it reacted against the attacker. The superiority of the threat they face is irrelevant. During British rule, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, our forefathers fought three major movements against the powerful British army. The movement was completely based on the path of nonviolence. The first one was in 1920, the Non-Cooperation Movement; the second one was the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement; and the last one was the 1942 Quit India Movement. Among these movements, the prominent one is the Civil Disobedience Movement, because this is the first movement in which a large number of people participated actively throughout the country. The movement is also known as the Salt Movement or the Salt Satyagraha because the first disobedience was made by breaking the salt law of the British government. Mahatma Gandhi selected Dandi on the Gujarat coast to break the salt law, and the Odisha Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee has chosen the coastal village Inchudi in Balasore to break the salt law. This paper is a study of the Salt Satyagraha of Inchudi, which is also popularly known as the second Dandi for its huge contribution to the success of the civil disobedience movement.

Keywords: Salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement, Balasore, Inchudi.

In March 1930, Gandhiji prepared the ground for starting a mass movement. After his conditional offer of eleven points' ultimatums was not accepted by the British, he decided to start the movement by breaking the salt law at Dandi on the Gujrat coast by March 1930. The salt law imposed by the British government was considered by him "to be the most iniquitous of all, from poor men's standpoints". The Dandi salt march created great enthusiasm among the people of India along with the people of Odisha. In Odisha, the Salt Movement was not an immediate event; rather, there was a long, continuous process behind it. That prelude was started with the arrival of the Simon Commission. Towards the end of February, Gandhiji decided to launch the Civil Disobedience movement by breaking the law at Dandi.

Background of Salt Law:

The Britishers came to India with a motto of trade, but in the course of time, they started to exploit India as much as they could. In the first phase, they came with nearly empty ships and carried away the wealth of India. But unfortunately, sometimes these ships could not overcome the heavy waves of sea. So very often they were broken and damaged, causing heavy losses. So, they decided to bring unfertile black soil from England to make their ship heavy and unloaded it on the bank of the river Huguly in Calcutta, which made the place popular as Kalighat[1]. In the course of time, they realized that bringing salt is more profitable than the unfertile soil. In 1718, to make a monopoly of their salt trade, they imposed a tax on Indian salt production and Indian clothes. Therefore, the price of indigenous salt became higher in comparison to the British-produced pure white salt, and the popularity and sale of Indian salt drastically decreased. Again in 1781 the East India Company opened a salt department to regulate the salt trade and abolished all the salt factories in India by paying compensation to the owners by providing them different jobs.

In 1835, the British government introduced a new law that restricted the selling of Indian salt outside of India. The British authorities reduced the tax on British salt while increasing the tax on Indian salt. For these random salt laws, the Indian salt markets were closed down. So, from 1825 to 1910, the British enjoyed a trade monopoly on salt. But during the First World War period, the international salt trade became impossible. So, the British started a new scheme according to which the British government gave licenses to a few Indians for the production of salt[2]. As a result of these frequent salt laws, the people of coastal India, particularly those in Odisha and mainly in Inchudi, suffered the most. The discontent was so high that they were ready to fight back against the British laws. This time Gandhiji's call for complete independence and the Civil Disobedience Movement added fuel to that discontentment, and they followed the Gandhian path with complete vigor for the Salt Movement.

Gandhi's decision received an enthusiastic response from the Congress leaders of Odisha. Harekrushna Mahatab, who was the President of the Utkal Provincial Congress, was particularly confident about organizing a successful Salt Satyagraha campaign in Odisha. During Gandhiji's visit to Odisha in 1927, he had suggested a proposal to start a salt movement in Odisha. Gandhiji replied that he was ready to launch a salt movement in Odisha if twenty-five people would be ready to sacrifice their lives[3]. The salt policy pursued by the British affected the poor people of Odisha, who were producing salt for their consumption and to supplement their income by trading. Odisha had a vast coastline. The breaking of salt law was of particular significance to the people of Odisha, as they were victims of economic exploitation of the colonial government.

As the first step to launch the salt satyagraha campaign, a meeting of the Utkal Provincial Congress committee was held at Cuttack at the residence of Gopabandhu Choudhury, Pranakrishna Padhiary, and Nabakrushna Choudhury, who expressed their reservation about the success of a mass movement in Odisha. They gave a proposal to proceed towards Gujarat to join Gandhiji there in the campaign[4]. However, Mahatab reassured the members that initiating the campaign in the Balasore District would ensure its success. The provincial Congress Committee ultimately decided to launch the Salt Satyagraha on the Balasore Coast under the leadership of Gopabandhu Choudhury.

There were various events that led to the Salt movement. Inchudi was a small village, situated on the seashore of the Bay of Bengal in the state of Odisha, situated 22 km from Balasore railway station and well connected by road, known as the Salt Road. Inchudi is also connected by sea route with other parts of India and outside India, which determined its economic prosperity. The geographical topography led to a favorable impact in the economic sphere. Inchudi is in the southeastern part of Balasore on the seashore of the Bay of Bengal, and nearly 700 acres of fields are watered by two rivers, namely the Dhobagondi and the Kantiachora. These rivers created the longest Chatipada (Salt Range), which makes a huge production of salt possible[5]. The people of Inchudi followed two occupations: the first one is agriculture, and the other is salt production. After harvesting their crops, the people of Inchudi engaged themselves in the salt industry. These two occupations enriched Inchudi most. This salt was not only consumed by them but also was popular in other markets. The adjacent villages also prepared salt and became a part of this salt-producing business community[6].

There were reasonable causes behind the selection of Inchudi as the venue of Salt Satyagraha.

Inchudi was chosen as the center for the Odisha Salt movement because, firstly, it was the major salt-producing area till the 19th century and was badly affected by the British law and policies.

Second, the town was well-connected by roads, but the roads were so bad during the rainy season that police could barely get there to stop the movement. So, it was another advantage for the Satyagrahis[7].

Thirdly, markets in Balasore very warmly welcomed the local salt, although its price was quite high in comparison with Liverpool salt, and the patriotic feelings inspired the people to spend a little more money on the local salt, which was produced by the Satyagrahis during the Civil-Disobedient Movement[8].

Fourthly, blessed by a long salt field, Inchudi was considered a major salt-producing place from very early days. Therefore, the availability of a large quantity of salt fields attracted the attention of contemporary prominent leaders towards Inchudi[9].

Fifthly, the people of Inchudi were loaded with the dynamic patriotism displaying mass participation and support[10].

Salt Campaign at Inchudi:

During Mahatma Gandhi's Odisha tour in December 1927, Harekrushna Mahatab had discussed the prospect of a salt campaign with him. Gandhi's reaction was encouraging[11]. "After the Lahore congress and the great mass awakening for the Independence Day, there was a movement afoot in the coastal areas of the district of Balasore to organize some form of salt Satyagraha even if the U.P.C.C. did not take the initiative in starting the Satyagraha." This report of the secretary, U.P.C.C., is substantiated by the confidential report of the government that, "under the leadership of notorious Harekrushna Mahatab, an attempt is being made to start civil disobedience and illicit manufacture of salt in Balasore and Puri districts, respectively." There was also a good deal of talk about a campaign to withhold the payment of Chowkidari tax.

The U.P.C.C. met at Balasore on 16th March 1930 and resolved to launch Salt Satyagraha in Odisha[12]. An appeal was made to the people to extend all kinds of response to make the Salt Satyagraha a success and thus paved the way for the establishment of Poorna Swaraj. Inchudi on the sea coast, 12 miles from Balasore, was selected to be the place where the salt campaign was to begin during national week in April. Harekrushna Mahatab and Surendra Nath Das were entrusted with the responsibility of making all possible arrangements at Balasore and Inchudi. The district Congress Committees were directed to recruit volunteers who would participate in the movement and to carry on other programs of Congress at full speed." [13]

Mahatab and Surendra Nath Das diligently labored day and night to initiate the campaign at Inchudi. In fact, they had so thoroughly drilled nationalistic ideas into the minds of the villagers and roused their patriotic sentiments that they showed exemplary tenacity of purpose and courage to plunge into the movement[14]. In the meanwhile, many people, including prominent Congress leaders, volunteered themselves to break the salt law. Even before the actual breach of salt law was made, the government imposed 144 cr. P.C. on some prominent leaders who desired to address mass meetings to enlist public support for their cause. On 23rd March, a public meeting was arranged at Cuttack to open the camp. In spite of the prohibitive order, the audience swelled in thousands disobeying the government order; Gopabandhu Choudhury and Purna Chandra Bose delivered speeches in the meeting. Gopabandhu Choudhury enjoined upon other leaders such as Bhagirathi Mohapatra, Jadumoni Mangaraj, Prankrushna Padhiary, Atal Bihari Acharya, Nabakrushna Choudhury, and Rajkrushna Bose, who were present in the meeting, not to violate the order"[15]. Similar meetings were held in other parts of Odisha. At Sambalpur, Laxmi Narayan Mishra and Bhagirathi Pattanaik were arrested for violating the prohibitive order. There was widespread response throughout the province for Salt Satyagraha. Within a very short time, the number of Satyagrahis who broke the salt law rose to 200 by April 1, 1930. Thus, Odisha got ready for the Civil Disobedience movement.

On March 12, 1930, Gandhi, with his 78 associates from the Sabarmati Ashram, started his historic Dandi March. Motibas Das, a Khadi student of Odisha, was one among them[16]. "Gandhi's March infected the whole nation. There were marches everywhere[17]. Gandhi's decision to break the Salt Law on the Gujarat sea-coast was received with much enthusiasm by the Congress leaders in Odisha. "The Utkal Provincial Congress Committee resolved on 28th February 1930 to make effective arrangements to start organized mass civil disobedience in some particular areas of the province in accordance with the instructions of the A.I.C.C.". Gopabandhu Choudhury was authorized to make all preliminary arrangements. He was appointed as the 'Dictator.' Before the

Satyagrahis of Odisha begin their march from Cuttack to Balasore, an advance party under the leadership of Pandit Panakrushna Padhiary was sent on 31st March to arrange meetings by propaganda and 'prime up the villagers for the coming ordeals.' The first batch of the twenty-one Satyagrahis, led by Gopabandhu Choudhury and Acharya Harihar, started their march on foot from the Swaraj Ashram, Cuttack, to Inchudi with all solemnity in the early morning on 6th April, the day when Gandhi broke the Salt Law at Dandi[18]. The party consisted of Golak Nath Day, Gokulananda Mohanty, Kishore Mohan Mohapatra, Biswanath Hota, and Kalipada Das of Balasore, and Durga Prashad Guru, Rama Prashad Sahu, and Sudhanshu Sekhar Gupta of Sambalpur. Gunanidhi Mohanty, Gouranga Charan Mohanty, Balaram Pati, Madhabananda Das, Sadhu Charan Padhi, Shiba Prashad Bhagat, Govinda Chandra Mohanty, Sridhar Moharana, and Udayanath Mohanty of Cuttack and Murari Tripathy and Raghunath Mishra of Puri[19]. They were given a warm-hearted send-off on the day of their Padayatra. The entire city of Cuttack was on the street to felicitate them[20].

Gandhi's message and the circular from Jawaharlal Nehru to start actual civil disobedience before 13th April made Gopabandhu Choudhury change his original plan to cover 129 miles from Cuttack to Balasore in a week. In the meanwhile, the government had arrested Surendra Nath Das and Jivaramji Kalyanji Kothari on 5th April for the experiments they made to manufacture salt from seawater on the Balasore coast[21]. Surendra Nath Das was the chief local organizer.

On 8th April, Gopabandhu Choudhury was arrested at Chandol under section 188 IPC for violating the prohibition order and was subsequently imprisoned for 7 days. In his absence, the party was led by Acharya Harihar[22]. The next day, "there was a fairly successful Hartal in connection with the arrest of the local 'Dictator' Gopabandhu Choudhury in Cuttack, and there were picketing and processions, too[23].

The second batch of Satyagrahis, led by Madan Mohan Pattnaik, set out for Balasore on 9th April from Cuttack[24]. It was known as Lauhastamba Vahini. It was followed by the Patitapaban Vahini of Puri under the leadership of Satyavadi Nanda. The Ganjam Vahini, the Sambalpur Vahini, and the Odisha Gujarati Vahini also joined them[25]. All the Satyagrahis reached Balasore in the morning of 12th April. After the afternoon prayer, Acharya Harihar with his 12 selected volunteers marched to their destination, Inchudi, in the same evening.[26]

They sang the song of Bira Kisore Das as such:

"O' come to-day

Who'll go to capture the sea

There were Pathans and Marathas

They were not so much exploitive

For fire, water

They had no tax-hunger for them……."[27]

There was an overpowering upsurge of inspiration among the volunteers and enthusiasm among the people at that time. The entire route from Balasore to Inchudi was full of men, women, and children to see the 'Satyagrahis' proceeding to the seashore. Villagers from far off also flocked to see them. Children garlanded the Satyagrahis. Ladies performed the ceremony of Bandapana (welcome) by strewing puffed rice and flowers on them from their trays.

Having finished his morning prayer on 13th April, Acharya Harihar waded into the sea and picked up some salt earth. In the presence of police, he, thus, broke the salt law. Thousands of people had gathered there to see the scene on the beach. He was arrested with six of his volunteers. Other volunteers were prevented from taking

salt earth. Acharya Harihar became the first Satyagrahi in Odisha. Encouraged by him, Pandit Padhiary, Madan Mohan Patnaik, and Biswanath Hota, with hundreds of men, broke the Salt Law and smilingly courted arrest. Soon a large number of Satyagrahis poured in from Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam, Sambalpur, Singhbhum, and the neighboring state, Mayurbhanj[28]. Hundreds of local people also began to prepare the contraband salt on the seashore. All of them were beaten and dispersed.

The next day, an old man named Binod Choudhury, with many other volunteers from the neighboring villages, started preparing the salt at Inchudi. They were beaten with Lathi. The salt earth they had collected was kicked, and their plains were broken[29]. In spite of this, the Satyagrahis went on persistently and patiently collecting salt-earth[30]. From 15th to 19th April, they worked from early morning to noon and again from 3pm to 6pm in the afternoon. The Salt Satyagraha thus gathered momentum; people from far and near flocked to the seashore of Balasore. The salt field of Inchudi became a place of pilgrimage. Without hesitation and without resistance, the Satyagrahis courted arrest. Despite the high spate of arrests, the salt campaign in Balasore continued unabated because fresh agitators poured in soon. [31]

Gopabandhu Choudhury was released on 19 April. He proceeded to Balasore in the same evening. The Congress Working Committee sat at Balasore. It decided to permit the villagers in general to start mass civil disobedience at different places on the Balasore seacoast. Gopabandhu Choudhury, Harekrushna Mahatab, and Dr. Krushna Prasad Mohanty were arrested near the Satyagraha camp. After their imprisonment, Nanda Kishore Das and Lingaraj Misra were chosen as President and Secretary of U.P.C.C., respectively. The salt campaign continued as usual.

The working committee decided to open a new Satyagraha center at Sartha on 20 April, 10 miles north of the first center, after giving prior notice to the District Magistrate. Karunakar Panigrahi, Nilambar Das, and Mathuri Behera took leadership of the villagers and volunteers. While manufacturing salt, they were arrested along with three other villagers. However, the entire coastline of Balasore became a center of activity when other locations, such as Rasalpur, Srijung, Bardhanpur, Bhimpur, Tundara, Kuanrpur, Ratai, Parikhi, Kheranga, Gudi, Rajabala, Salgaon, Athilabad, Boita, Brahmapur, Mandari, Panchpara, and Iram, were chosen for salt production. There were altogether twenty-one centers in Balasore District. As a result, the sea coast of Balasore witnessed the real scene of the Civil Disobedience in Odisha.

The most conspicuous thing was the prominent role of the Oriya women who participated in the salt campaign at Balasore and other places in Odisha. Smt. Rama Devi and Smt. Malati Devi had thrown their heart and soul into the freedom movement of Odisha from the very beginning. In the company of several women of the neighboring villages, namely Malati, Kokila, Jahnavi, Kiranbala, and Kananbala, they went to the first Satyagraha center on 20 April and openly manufactured salt. Hundreds of women followed them in a long procession blowing conches[32]. Volunteers from Gujarat and Bengal joined them.

On 21st April, about seven hundred persons from different villages went out on the second day of mass civil disobedience and manufactured mounds of salt openly at different centers. Thirty women of Kuanrpur joined the party, and thousands flocked to see them[33]. From 22nd April, the Satyagrahis adopted a novel method of manufacturing salt. The center where salt was prepared was surrounded by the volunteers who arranged themselves into a strong ring. As a result, it became nearly impossible for the police to penetrate this array. “60 Oriya ladies of the neighboring villages manufactured salt at Tundra, Boita, Inchudi, Kuanrpur, Kuligaon, Rasalpur, and Kasba." About 20 maunds of salt manufactured in different centers were brought to Balasore under regular Satyagrahi escort for sale[34]. The camp of the Satyagrahis at Balasore was in the Parmit Kothi (house) of Gouridatta Marwari. Interestingly, the British government collected salt tax in this house when it was made a monopoly of the government.

Conclusion:

Salt manufacture on the Balasore coast continued until the advent of the monsoon, and then it was suspended. Police forces had been withdrawn much before it. Salt Satyagraha was allowed to continue without interference. Having marked the indomitable enthusiasm of men and women and the fearlessness of the Satyagrahis, the government admitted that "the campaign has been pushed more energetically in Balasore than it has been in Bihar, and the police have been hampered considerably by difficulties of communication and because a considerable section of the local population has been distinctly sympathetic, partly, no doubt, through dislike of the statutory prohibition of the old Odisha industry of salt making." The police were thoroughly unsuccessful in hampering the manufacture of salt by all possible means. When the manufactured salt was sent to Balasore and exported to other places for sale[35]. The government admitted their defeat and reported that "the volunteers who have assembled from many districts spread their operations over a wide front, which is difficult for the police to control, and they have also persuaded some of the inhabitants to manufacture salt in their houses." This fact is fairly clear from the size of the consignments seized in the neighborhood of Balasore, one of which was as large as six maunds. Unable to control the situation, the government reported that "the campaign still continues in Balasore, but the coming rainfall will close down manufacture for the time being." The Salt Satyagraha was a huge success in the district of Balasore by the Utkal Pradesh Congress Committee. Inchudi is popularly considered the second Dandi in the history of the freedom movement of India. "The mass civil disobedience in Odisha was considered only second to the movement in Gujarat, where Gandhi himself had taken the lead".

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